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ABSTRACT

The elicitation procedures currently used by E. Sulzby in studies of emergent storybook reading were developed by addressing (1) how the wording of the elicitation request given sets up expectations on the child's part regarding language and behavior, (2) how the role that the investigator takes during the session affects the child/investigator interaction, and (3) how building of rapport, use of encouragements, and amount of "wait-time" affects the child's degree of participation and, ultimately, the success of the child/investigator interaction. As a result of Sulzby's initial studies of the emergent reading behaviors of bilingual children (Spanish and English), many questions about oral language development have arisen to broaden the study of written language development and oral/written language relationships. A conscious goal of Sulzby's research in learning about young children as readers and writers has been the constant assessment and development of her research methodology. Sulzby incorporates an experimental design with naturalistic investigation to provide checks and challenges to her reasoning about emergent literacy. As research in the area of emergent literacy develops, those seriously concerned with an accurate understanding of its process and product must continually assess and refine their research methodology. (JD)

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(Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference -- 35th, San Diego, CA, December 3-7, 1985)

Product vs. Process: The Relevance of Methodology in the Elicitation of Storybook Re-enactments from Young Children

Introduction

It has become increasingly apparent to researchers in the area of "emergent literacy" (e.g, Clay, 1975, 1979a, 1979b; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Goodman, 1984; Goodman & Goodman, 1979; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Heath, 1982, 1983; Hiebert, 1981; Holdaway, 1979; Sulzby, 1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1985) that 1) children formulate concepts about reading and writing that are not directly taught to them and are also not yet conventional, 2) children's "knowledges" (Sulzby, 1981) about literacy help them develop as both readers and writers, 3) children's emergent literacy behaviors play an important role in their continuing literacy development and, thus, 4) young children know a lot more about literacy before formal instruction begins than adults and schools have given them credit for.

Along with the growing level of empirical knowledge and theoretical concerns in this still relatively new area of "emergent literacy" should be a growing awareness and concern about the methodological procedures being used. A number of researchers studying storybook reading have conducted naturalistic observations of parent-child interaction or the "bedtime story" (Doake, 1981; Teale, 1984). Others have developed methodologies based on naturalistic observations that investigate what young children do when requested to read storybooks as an independent act or "re-enactment" as some have

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termed it. Among those researchers are Doake (1981), Haussler (1982), Rossman (1980), Schickedanz (1978), and Sulzby (1981, 1983a, 1983b, 1985). This paper will focus on research in emergent storybook reading and will address a number of issues concerning the elicitation of storybook reading from children, ages two to six, who are not yet reading conventionally from print. More explicitly, the purpose of this paper is to discuss, in general, the development of the elicitation procedures presently being used in the studies of emergent reading behaviors conducted under the direction of Elizabeth Sulzby of Northwestern University. In addition, a few specifics as to how these procedures have been used in approaching the elicitation of storybook reading from bilingual (Spanish-English) pre-school and kindergarten children are briefly discussed. This paper does not advocate Sulzby's elicitation procedures but instead attempts to convey the underlying theme that an increased understanding of the area of emergent literacy development necessitates the assessment and refinement of the types of methodological procedures employed.

Research in Storybook Reading

In terms of the studies that have explored children's independent reading of storybooks, the methodology employed seems to reflect the level of empirical knowledge of the field, the types of research questions being asked and the theoretical foundation of the specific study. It is through these researchers' interpretations of existing empirical knowledge and

theoretical foundations that the methodology in a particular field becomes refined and begins to more rigorously re-examine current issues and to address new concerns of more specificity and focus. Now that the level of empirical knowledge in the area of emergent reading behaviors has grown in scope, it becomes increasingly apparent that attention must be paid to the specific circumstances that surround these storybook interview sessions. More explicitly, in terms of this paper, a serious methodological question must be raised. To what extent are these elicited children's reading attempts prior to conventional reading independent of the elicitation procedures used? That is, whether the differences found in the storybook re-enactments are due solely to individual differences in the levels of the children's emergent reading ability or whether the children's responses are influenced by variations in the investigator's verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Sulzby has struggled with this question throughout the past seven years of investigating emergent storybook reading behaviors and the ongoing development of the elicitation procedures presently being used in her studies of independent storybook readings are a reflection of this struggle.

Due to Sulzby's belief that the systematic study of human development encompasses the observation of process along with product and her belief in being methodologically rigorous, thus, providing checks for validity, her methodological orientation proposes a rejection of the often implied dichotomy between relevance and rigor. Methodology can be both experimental and

descriptive and one need not assume the incompatibility of research in natural situations and the applicability of structured procedures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In contrast, she advocates a methodology that expands and converges the naturalistic and experimental approaches. A methodology that is instrumental in the investigation of the process called human development. It is from this methodological perspective that Sulzby attempts to look at emergent reading behaviors.

Sulzby's Elicitation Procedures

At this time a brief overview of Sulzby's current procedures of emergent storybook elicitation will be presented. Each part of this overview will be expanded on later in this discussion. (The procedures used presently differ from those reported by Sulzby (1985) in only one way--dropping an encouragement that called for a metacognitive response and substituting it with a turntaking encouragement.)

The elicitations are based on the assumption that children will be reading from "favorite storybooks," defined as books that children have heard read repeatedly, usually at their own request, that they have attempted to read themselves, and for which they offer to correct an adult's deviation from the text as they have experienced it. In some studies, kindergarteners have been asked to select their own favorites from classroom collections. In other studies, and all of those with younger or bilingual children, books were introduced and repeatedly read by the classroom teacher. The only exception to this was one study

in which parents were asked to send children's favorites from home.

After sufficient acquaintance with the book and the team of researchers, children are taken individually to a quiet room and asked to read a book or set of books. The elicitation is worded, "Read me your book." If the child hesitates or refuses, a graduated set of encouragements are used. The final encouragement in the set engages the child in being read to, with techniques used to elicit active interaction such as echo-reading or sentence completion.

From this body of research, Sulzby (1985) has suggested that at least ten sub-categories of emergent storybook reading can be detected prior to the child's reading independently from print, which is the eleventh sub-category of the classification scheme. She has found evidence that these sub-categories can be ordered developmentally, although she has speculated that the ordering would not necessarily be the same for children who come from a cultural and linguistic background in which features of oral and written language are related differently than those of the children studied thus far.

Within Sulzby's scheme are two levels of refusal. A "high-level" refusal includes the child's statement that he or she cannot read for specific reasons tied to knowledge about print. This refusal is a sub-category placed high in the scheme (eighth). A "low-level" refusal is not a sub-category, or is the zero position. These children refuse to read without explaining

why they cannot read. All of these children then interact in some way with the book during interactive reading. If a child refuses at first, and then begins to take over the reading alone, then the child's reading can be placed in the sub-categories of Sulzby's classification scheme.

Since young children are being dealt with in these investigations, the validity of these low-level refusals is critical. Children often refuse or are reluctant to attempt a requested activity; thus, it must be ascertained as closely as possible whether a given refusal is a legitimate refusal or one that a change in methodology could easily overcome.

Due to Sulzby's concern as to how elicitation procedures affect the number of refusals and the ultimate outcome of each child's storybook re-enactment, she has consistently re-examined the data from previous studies to look at investigator-child interactions in order to assess and refine procedures for subsequent studies. Thus, the present elicitation procedures have been developed by addressing three major questions that arose as a result of the re-examination of collected data: 1) How does the wording of the elicitation request given set up expectations on the part of the child as to the language and behavior expected? 2) How does the role the investigator takes during the session affect the child-investigator interaction? and 3) How does the building of rapport, use of encouragements and amount of "wait-time" affect the child's degree of participation and, ultimately, the success of the child-investigator

interaction? The remainder of this paper will present a brief discussion concerning these three questions and, hopefully, some further insight into how these elicitation procedures are currently being implemented will also be imparted.

The Wording of the Elicitation Request

In the studies of independent storybook interactions the language used to elicit re-enactments differed as to whether the child was directed to "read" or to "tell" the story. To date there has been no systematic exploration of young children's differential responses to the directions to "read the story" or to "tell the story" when interacting with a storybook. Sulzby (1981, 1983b, 1985) has found that kindergarten children make different responses to the prompts to "tell a story," to "dictate a story" and to "read their dictated story." The children's productions in response to these prompts were different in overall narrative description, intonation pattern, and fluency. Thus, the exact wording of the elicitation request seems to set up expectations on the part of the child as to the language and/or behavior expected. Sulzby is explicit in her prompting procedure to always ask the child to "read." The investigator is not to say, "Can you read me the book?" which may be interpreted as a judgment about the child's ability, or "Tell me the book" or "Tell me about the book," both of which can be interpreted as a storytelling request. Instead, the investigator is to say, "Read me the book" or "Read the book to me."

The Role of the Investigator

The various independent storybook interaction studies have also differed in the role given to the investigator during the interview session. In Sulzby's studies the investigator's focus has been on the story as a shared and enjoyable experience. Although it is difficult to speculate exactly what effects the differences in investigator roles have on independent storybook interactions, it is safe to assume that the nature of the child-investigator interaction is affected. Instances where the investigator is unhampered and able to become involved in the actual process of the enjoyment of a shared experience should increase the child's interest in and motivation to re-enact the story. It also makes the requested task a relevant and valid one. In situations where the investigator is involved in coding and scoring the child's behavior, the child could easily interpret the storybook interaction to be a performance test rather than an experience of mutual pleasure. Thus, for Sulzby and her team of investigators the overall directions are to keep the emphasis on storybook sharing as an enjoyable, positive literacy event.

The Building of Rapport

In any interview setting, the participation level of the individual being interviewed comes about to some degree in response to the level of rapport that is established between the interviewer and the interviewee. Sulzby has found in her studies that the younger children are the more refusals an investigator

is likely to get; therefore, rapport is extremely critical when young children are to be interviewed. In Sulzby's studies several provisions serve to foster rapport between the child and the interviewer or investigator.

Prior to each study, Sulzby and her team of research assistants work together to develop an investigator's manual of general directions and suggestions and in which a script is devised that is natural sounding in its attempt to elicit cooperation from each child. The investigators memorize and follow the script carefully, but at a natural, relaxed pace during each interview session. They are trained to be animated and assured in their administration and give positive verbal and nonverbal feedback, without projecting any type of evaluation. Again, the emphasis being that the researcher wants to be seen as a trusted adult by the child and not as a "tester." The following is an example of the type of general directions and script found in these study manuals.

> Go to the classroom. Working from the assignment list of children to be interviewed, each examiner will take one child at a time in the order in which their names appear on the list. Re-introduce yourself to the child by saying:
>
> **HI, _____(child's name), I'M _____(adult's name). YOU REMEMBER ME? YOUR TEACHER SAID THAT YOU COULD READ TO ME NEXT. COME WITH ME AND WE'LL FIND A QUIET PLACE TO READ.**

Before each study's interview sessions, the investigators who are to elicit storybook readings visit the classroom on various occasions. This is done primarily to allow the children and the teacher to become accustomed to the researchers and the

researchers, in turn, are given the opportunity to observe and set up initial rapport with the class. This type of introduction of research personnel has been conducive in the establishment of more relaxed, comfortable interview sessions.

Other situations that foster rapport prior to the actual interview sessions are based simply on consideration and respect for the child and his or her individual needs. For example, although an assignment list of children is used (i.e., young children first, children with more English proficiency first) changes in that order are made for children who are engaged in an activity (e.g., painting, gym) so that they are not interrupted or taken from something they want to participate in. It has been in only rare instances that a child has hesitated when invited to come and read but when this has happened and the child's expressed relunctance cannot be swayed by teacher or investigator, the child is told, **"PERHAPS YOU'LL BE READY TO COME AND READ LATER (OR TOMORROW)."** In terms of Sulzby's studies many children have demonstrated their eagerness or desire to read by approaching the investigators and asking them "When is it my turn to read?" or saying, "I can't wait until it's my turn to read."

As investigators take each child to the session site, they talk with the child to build further rapport and to put the child at ease. The investigators are continually conscious of the fact that building rapport is extremely important when working with younger children. It must be approached slowly, assuredly and with a sensitivity toward the needs of each child. The

investigators also tell the child that they will bring him or her back to the classroom when the session is finished.

During the interview session itself the emphasis, as stated previously, is on the re-enactment of the story rather than on the child's performance. Thus, any comments made by the investigator are to relate to the child's story and not to reading performance. When the child responds with an incorrect verbal response, no correction should be made. The child's incorrect nonverbal responses (e.g., page turning, book directionality) should also not be corrected. In this way the emphasis or the task as a shared literacy event is preserved and the child's behaviors may be analyzed for evidences of emergent reading ability. The script is followed throughout the remainder of the session and at the end of the reading attempt the child is praised. For example, at the end of each reading the investigator says to the child:

> **THAT'S A GREAT STORY! I'M GLAD YOU SHARED IT WITH ME. YOU KNOW A LOT ABOUT READING. THANK YOU FOR READING (SHARING) THIS BOOK TO (WITH) ME.**

"Wait-time" and Encouragements

If the child does not begin reading immediately after the investigator's request to "read" the book of significance seems to be the amount of "wait-time." In two of Sulzby's earlier studies insufficient wait-time for the children to initiate a reading was judged to be a factor in interview sessions where children did not make independent reading attempts and, thus, were coded as refusals. Due to this realization, Sulzby's

research assistants are now trained to use plenty of wait-time. Whenever children do not begin to read independently after being requested to, the investigators are to keep waiting. They are to keep an expectant, encouraging look on their faces and to be particularly aware of and note the nonverbal behaviors of the children when they do not begin to read aloud immediately. For example, if they page through the book and seem to be reading it silently the investigators are not to interrupt but to allow each child to finish what he or she is doing. Then the investigators are to say to the child, **"NOW READ THE BOOK TO ME SO THAT I CAN HEAR IT."**

If the child does not respond to the request to "read" after ample wait-time, the following encouragements are used by the investigator. Sulzby and her research assistants follow this sequence of encouragements in each interview, again with plenty of "wait-time" after each encouragement.

1) **TRY.** (or **GIVE IT A TRY.** or **DO YOUR BEST.**)
2) **PRETEND. PRETEND-READ IT.**
3) **IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE LIKE GROWN-UP READING. DO IT YOUR OWN WAY.**
4) If the child continues to refuse, say, **LET ME READ A BIT TO YOU,** then read the first page or two. Then say, **NOW IT'S YOUR TURN. YOU READ TO ME.**
5) If the child continues to refuse, then say, **LET'S READ IT TOGETHER,** and begin interactive reading. Here you make up the kind of reading you think best suits this child, being careful to respond to the child's behaviors. Also, try to elicit independent reading at points when you think it's likely that the child might cooperate. **NOW IT'S YOUR TURN. YOU READ IT TO ME.**

Some types of interactive reading used have been:

Adult reads and pauses occasionally for the child to complete a predictable phrase.

Adult reads and child begins to "mumble along" with the adult.

Adult reads and child begins to repeat or echo the words when the adult pauses.

Adult reads and asks child questions about what's happening or what may happen. (Do not turn this into a "lesson," however--keep the emphasis upon enjoying the story.)

Adult reads and then the child takes over and reads independently.

Adult reads and child sits and listens.

These additional encouragements were designed to gradually restructure the reading task so that the child would attempt the story re-enactment rather than terminate the session by insisting, "I can't." The initial prompt to "read" and additional encouragements are an approximation of Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) notion of the zone of proximal development in reverse--beginning with a request that the child perform independently, then move through graduated levels of slightly increased support from the adult.

The first three encouragements indicate to the child that the investigator realizes the "reading" may not be conventional or like "grown-up" reading but that his/her own way is a legitimate and acceptable way to read. The second encouragement is of particular interest for it asks the child to "pretend," a word taken from children themselves as reported by Holdaway (1979), Sulzby (1981, 1983a) and others. Pretend play is an

important part of a young child's normal activities and children have been observed pretend-reading and pretend-writing. It is once again critical to allow ample "wait-time" following each of these initial encouragements to provide a relaxed atmosphere for the child's responses. The child's responses to any of these encouragements could result in an independent interaction with the storybook.

In contrast, the two remaining encouragements involve more assistance from the adult. The purpose of the final emcouragements is not instructional but is to provide various types of adult assistance that encourage responses from the child that approximate reading. The procedures to be followed at this level focus on the child's responses to the assisted reading. The underlying goal is also to return the interaction to an independent level; where the child is re-enacting the story without adult assistance. The investigator reads the text at a moderate pace and waits for the child to turn the pages, to handle the book. Subsequent investigator behaviors should be determined by the child's ongoing responses to the interaction situation. Instances where the child remains nonverbal may also be followed with the resumption of reading by the investigator to return the focus of the session to the enjoyment of the story rather than focusing on the child's performance.

The investigator may terminate the storybook interview session if the child appears to tense up or become upset. The investigator may also decide to read part of the book if the

child is experiencing fatigue though still expressing an interest in the story. Investigators are instructed to observe the child's reactions to prompts and to note any deviations from the suggested procedures that were used, either at the child's or adult's instigation. The key, once again, is to allow ample "wait-time" to increase the possibility of the child going ahead and reading independently.

While it is difficult to speculate the exact effect of the additional encouragements on the response of each child, it is apparent that through the use of additional encouragements and ample periods of "wait-time" that children's initial refusals to read have often resulted in instances of independent or assisted storybook interactions.

In terms of the final outcome of the interview session, it can be observed that both the verbal and nonverbal behaviors (role assumed) of the investigator have the potential to signal behavioral expectations for the storybook interaction to children. Thus, Sulzby's elicitation procedures have been developed to 1) provide a positive literacy experience, 2) elicit what the children can do independently, and 3) provide gradual assistance to the children who do not respond to the initial request to read the storybook. Ultimately, what must be kept in mind in the development of procedures used to elicit storybook re-enactments, is that young children are curious and extremely interested in their own growing "knowledges" and if approached in an encouraging, candid and sensitive manner, will perform. In

Sulzby's case the assessment and refinement of methodology has paid off in the further accomplishment of her methodological goals.

Storybook Readings in Spanish and English by Bilingual Kindergarteners and Preschool Children

In November of 1984 and in January of 1985, respectively, the storybook readings of students in a bilingual kindergarten program and in a bilingual preschool program were begun. These studies, funded by the Spencer Foundation, were designed to elicit emergent reading attempts in both Spanish and English following repeated readings of a storybook by their classroom teacher in both languages. Additionally, multiple copies of the book were placed in the classroom and the children were allowed to "read" them during their leisure or free time.

Two primary questions were addressed in these studies. First, would Spanish-speaking children from low income and limited literacy backgrounds who had attained little English proficiency show the same kinds of emergent reading behaviors found in middle income Anglo kindergarteners and preschoolers? Second, in what ways would these children show emergent reading behaviors in both Spanish and English?

The methodological procedures were the same as the ones previously described and used in studies of middle income Anglo children's emergent reading behaviors. During the initial rapport building visits to the classroom, a number of children were asked to read to the researchers from the classroom collection of books. Some children "read" in English from

Spanish books and some "read" in Spanish from English books. It was also during this piloting period that expectations became stronger that the reading behaviors would generalize across languages but that the children would show additional behaviors such as, a "translation" mode. This mode was demonstrated by a child who examined the picture on a page, muttered to himself in Spanish, then said, "it says....." for each page read.

For the actual interview sessions investigator's manuals were developed for both the kindergarten and preschool studies. The previously discussed initial request to "read" and encouragements were used with the addition of the following special encouragement. This encouragement could be used with children who say, "I can't read in English" or "I can't read in Spanish."

WELL, PRETEND YOU CAN. PRETEND-READ IT IN ENGLISH/ SPANISH.

All prompts used to elicit an independent reading of the storybook from the children were professionally translated into the Spanish most commonly used by Mexicans/Mexican-Americans since this was the ethnic background of the majority of the children in both studies.

The school district that houses these bilingual programs is quite a distance from the University and the course schedules of the fluent Spanish-speaking research assistants were the most difficult to arrange. In order to have those persons travel the least it was decided that the researchers with the least Spanish proficiency would interview the children with the greatest

English proficiency and the fluent Spanish-speaking research assistants would be reserved for the children whom the observations indicated and the teachers thought would be most reluctant to read in both languages without a great deal of encouragement in Spanish. Specific directions are provided in the manuals as to the procedures for investigators who are English speakers or for those who are not fluent in Spanish.

With unexpected absences of children, school district special events, University scheduling problems, the study was nearing an end without yet having the fluent Spanish-speaking investigators go out to the schools. However, the children had all been reading in Spanish to the four investigators who ranged from moderate Spanish fluency to one with no knowledge of Spanish. Given this turn of events, it was decided that the three adults with moderate to weak Spanish (two of whom are former ESL teachers) try to elicit readings from the few children remaining and a special trip would be made with a fluent Spanish-speaking investigator if necessary.

The outcome of the difficulty encountered in the scheduling of the fluent Spanish-speaking investigators was an important and surprising finding: every child read in Spanish without needing a fluent Spanish-speaking investigator. This means that there were no refusals to re in Spanish. (There were a few refusals to read in English that ended in interactive reading.) Thus, sufficient data was collected to make cross-language comparisons as well as to draw some immediate conclusions about low-income

Mexican-American children's emergent literacy.

The interpretation of this finding seems to be dependent upon two possible characteristics of the studies: first, the story, one which children appear to have a strong affinity for, was read repeatedly by their teachers in an engaging manner in both languages; second, the investigators were trained in the use of a warm, communicative approach, with more emphasis on enjoying the sharing of the story than on the child's "level of performance." Thus, in these studies, the methodology employed seems to be the crucial element in the success level of the elicitation of bilingual children's readings or re-enactments.

Another finding is that children use both oral-like and written-like language in the Spanish readings, as well as in the English readings. Of significance are the readings obtained by the investigator who spoke and understood no Spanish. Even with this researcher, children used interactive conversational characterisitics and deictic references to the pictures which both adult and children could see. Tentative interpretations in this area center on the strength of the interpersonal, pragmatic features of language, part of what is called "communicative competence." It has been observed in oral language development that young children speak as if an adult can see or experience things that only the child is privy to; in these cases, the child appears to be speaking as if the adult can understand meaning independent of the language used. With other, more advanced children, however, more awareness of the language differences was

evident--especially in regard to English. One child laughed when asked to read in English. When encouraged repeatedly, she laughed again, shrugged her shoulders and said, "Como?" (How?). Nevertheless, she was encouraged to read in English as well as in Spanish.

The past decade has been one of dynamic development, growth in interest and controversy in both bilingual education and reading and yet within bilingual education concern for reading has seldom reflected current research and theory, and little research has focused on reading within bilingual programs. As a result of Sulzby's initial studies in the area of emergent reading behaviors of bilingual children many questions about oral language development have arisen to broaden the study of written language development and oral/written language relationships. While keeping the focus of continued research in this area, the study of emergent reading of storybooks, the further investigation of the kinds of organizational and political decisions that affect the well-being and development of the children of Spanish-speaking background in this country must also be of concern. In particular, whether these decisions influence differentially the oral/written language relationships that these children develop.

Conclusion

In conclusion, researchers who wish to observe and record the development of children are influenced by the nature of their young subjects and by the need to assess both process and product

to reconsider traditional methdology. Thus, research in emergent literacy has resulted in the development of new techniques of observation, elicitation and analysis. A conscious goal of Sulzby's research in learning about young children as readers and writers, has been the constant development of methodology. A methodology that attempts to preserve some of the beneficial attributes of experimental design and incorporate some of the beneficial attributes of more naturalistic investigation, using the combination to provide checks and challenges to reasoning about emergent literacy.

As any research area grows in scope and knowledge, the generation of serious methodological issues should and, indeed, must arise. For as understanding of emergent literacy increases, those seriously in pursuit of a deeper, more accurate understanding of its process and product must continually be concerned with the development, assessment, re-assessment, refinement and possible re-definement of methodology.

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